

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 18 August, 2002

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

Welcome back to another year of CHURCH STUFF.

And welcome back to another year in general.

And an especial welcome to Catholics in the Class of 2006 as you join the Catholic community at West Point.

It was a busy summer here, but to be honest, we missed having lots of you around.

Good to have you back.

I'd like to suggest that an apt theme for the year be JESUS CHRIST.

As it says in Hebrews 13:8 -

JESUS CHRIST is the same - yesterday, today and tomorrow.

So I open this first CHURCH STUFF with part of the ancient Irish "Prayer of St. Patrick":

I arise today
through God's strength to direct me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak to me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's hosts to save me from snares of devils,
from temptation of vices,
from everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and anear,
alone and in a multitude.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all who love me,
Christ in mouth of friend or stranger.

Amen.

May JESUS CHRIST be your support and your foundation this year, and may you and he grow ever closer until you become one.

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

PLEBE RETREAT

The annual PLEBE RETREAT will be held over Ring Weekend at Camp Buckner. If you're a Cow or a Yearling and have a desire to help out as a member of the Team, please let me know.

CADET SUNDAY MASS

is celebrated every Sunday in WH5300 at 1715. Gym-A is OK to wear (or running suit).

DAILY MASS

Every weekday (not Saturday) at 0630 in the Catholic Chaplain's Office in Washington Hall.

LECTOR, EUCHARISTIC MINISTER

Lots of you have expressed interest in participating at Chapel as Lectors, Ushers or Eucharistic Ministers. I'll be sending out info about these after Labor Day Weekend.

PARISH PICNIC

The Fall PARISH PICNIC will be held at Camp Buckner on Sunday, 8 September. Mass will be celebrated at noon, followed by the picnic. Transportation will be provided for cadets. More details to follow.

DO YOU WANT TO JOIN SOMETHING?

If you have any interest in joining a Cadet Catholic organization, you can sign up on CLUB NIGHT (Tuesday, 20 September). Here's a list of possibilities:

CATHOLIC CHOIR

RELIGIOUS ED TEACHERS

UNITED CATHOLIC FELLOWSHIP

RCIA (How to Become a Catholic)

THAYER CIRCLE (A discussion group)

MILITARY COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC

WOMEN

CATHOLIC FOLK GROUP
BIBLE STUDY
KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Let me know if you want any info on any of them.

DID YOU KNOW?

WHY BE CATHOLIC?

Anglican historian Owen Chadwick, in his book "The Popes and European Revolution" comments:

The religious world of Haydn and Mozart had the characteristics of the Catholic eighteenth century, that it was a world of happy religion...Like rococco architects, these were not men of an otherworldly religion, or (if they were) the other world was close to this world and permeated all its being.

Precisely.

Perhaps without realizing it, Professor Chadwick put his finger on the essence, the genius, the fundamental orientation of Catholicism, that aspect of our heritage which distinguishes us from all other great world religions.

We believe that the sacred is everywhere, that it lurks among us, sanctifying everything. We live in haunted houses, enchanted by the Holy Spirit.

God is not (only) distant.

God is among us in the water, the bread and wine, the oil, the body of the beloved.

And in the sun and the moon and the stars, in reconciliation after quarrels, in the touch of a friendly hand, in a glorious summer sunrise, in a chill winter sunset behind a frozen lake, in a familiar face seen in a crowd after many years of absence, in the cool waters of summer and the blazing fire of winter, in chocolate ice cream (with raspberry sauce!), in a joyous romp with our lover.

Grace is everywhere.

All is grace!

Alone of the major world religions, Catholicism affirms life, affirms flesh, affirms pleasure, affirms art and music, affirms a God who is present in the objects and events and persons of daily life.

Hence we have angels and saints and souls in purgatory and stained glass and statues and Mary the Mother of Jesus.

They all remind us of the presence of God in the Sacraments as well as in all the sacraments of our world...

Catholics know with St. Therese that God is nothing but mercy and love.

They know with the Irish Dominican poet Paul Murray that God loves us so much that if any one of us should cease to exist He would die of sadness.

They know with the American theologian Robert Barron that God cannot help but love us with the tender love of a mother.

There is a distinctively Catholic imagination - sacramental, liturgical, analogical, call it what you wish - which enables Catholics to see the world through a different set of lenses...

Catholicism is thus a religion of festivity and celebration, of holidays and parties, of a sacred calendar, of Christmas cribs and Easter lilies, of processions and pilgrimages, of seasons and colors, of special prayers and special patrons.

They are all part of the explanation of why Catholicism is a happy religion and why it is fun to be Catholic.

The other dimension of Catholicism which is so attractive to Catholics is its emphasis on community - an emphasis which is diametrically opposed to the emphasis on the individual which is so much part of American culture.

Catholicism teaches and Catholics believe in their bones that we relate to God as part of a network of family, friends and neighbors.

Catholics cluster, they bond, they converge, they swarm.

Catholicism means "Here comes everybody!".

We are not a religion only for the saved, much less for those who think they are saved...

It's more fun being Catholic because it's more fun to belong to something than to be a religious lone wolf...

by Father Andrew Greeley,
quoted in "I Like Being catholic",
by Leach and Borchard,
Doubleday, October 2000

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...the uncle of a cadet ('05), who is fighting cancer. Please remember him and his family.

...the Class of 2006, as it begins the Academic year and celebrates "Acceptance Weekend".

...family members of the Class of 2006 who will travel this weekend to celebrate "Acceptance" into the Corps.

...all members of the Class of 2004 as they prepare for Sunday's "Affirmation Ceremony".

...The Class of 2003 as it prepares to celebrate "Ring Weekend", and for all those who will travel to celebrate the weekend with them.

...all those who will be participating in the "Plebe Retreats" over Ring Weekend.

...any cadets who are on Medical Leave and all in Cadetland who have any medical problems.

...all family or friends of the members of the Corps who died over the summer.

...all our military personnel and their families throughout the world, especially those in areas of risk.

GOT A QUESTION?

(FEEL FREE TO WRITE ME WITH QUESTIONS,
AND I'LL ANSWER THEM HERE)

Q: Can you give me run-down of what Communion is when you do it in your Masses?
(I'm a Baptist, and I believe that it is a representation of Christ's blood and body, and it's a reproduction of the Last Supper, which makes us all part of the body of Christ, or his church).

A: Catholics believe that when someone receives Holy Communion, he or she is uniting him/herself to the living Jesus of Nazareth as He exists now - in glory - in the presence of our Father-God. In other words, we believe that Jesus is truly present in the consecrated bread and wine, and we receive his body, blood, soul and divinity under the forms of bread and wine.

The Catholic tradition uses the words "Real Presence" to describe this belief. We hold that in the Eucharist, Jesus Christ - as God and man - makes himself wholly and entirely present. For us, there certainly is symbolism involved, but at its essence, we believe in a "real" presence of the Risen Lord in the elements of bread and wine.

So naturally, we would have a problem with your use of the word "representation" simply because we believe that after the words of consecration "This is my body...this is my blood", the glorified Christ is truly present.

And not by any power of the priest, either. As an early Church writer put it:

It is not man that causes the things offered
to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but
he who was crucified for us, Christ himself.
The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces
these words, but their power and grace are God's.
This is my body, he says. This word transforms
the things offered.

St. John Chrysostom (d. 407 AD)

"De proditiōe Iudae", 1:6

The bread and wine don't simply "represent" Jesus; they actually become Jesus. The bread and wine are transformed.

But we do not believe that this presence is a "physical" one, nor do we understand the words "body" and "blood" to refer to the material body and blood that you and I have.

We receive Jesus in his "glorified" state - that is, the condition he is in since his Resurrection from death.

So, of course, that leads to the question: if we're talking about "body" and "blood" in another dimension than the one we live in, what exactly do we mean? What is a "glorified" body? How does it differ from the body that you and I have now?

We don't know the full answers to those questions, but Catholic tradition has always firmly believed that however it happens, the bread and wine are truly the living and glorified Christ, present among us for our sanctification.

Going on with your question, we would certainly agree that Holy Communion unites us to the Last Supper (and also to Jesus' death on the cross and to his Resurrection, too)...and that it creates and strengthens the bond between us as believers that we call "The Church". We believe the Holy Eucharist to be the basic bond of the Church. St. Augustine (d. 430) said it best, when he preached to his congregation after they had received Holy Communion. He said:

You have received the body of Christ;
you must become that which you have received.

The whole spectrum of the Catholic idea about the Eucharist can be summed up in a stanza from a medieval hymn by the theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274):

O sacred Banquet,
in which Christ becomes our food,
the memory of his passion is renewed,
the soul is filled with grace,
and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

Hope that gives you some insight into our views. Please write again if you'd like any further clarification.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

PRE-EXISTENCE:

In theological terms, PRE-EXISTENCE refers to the belief that Jesus Christ - as a "person" - did not originate at his "historical birth" but in some sense existed BEFOREHAND as an "eternal being".

You don't find this explicitly stated in Matthew, Mark or Luke's Gospels, but John's Gospel is very clear about it:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God...
All things came to be through him...
And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us...

John 1:1-3,14

You also find it pretty clear in St. Paul:

Although he (Christ) was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal to God
something to be clung to.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness...

Philippians 2:6-7

You can also find this expressed in Colossians and in Hebrews, and it is the cornerstone of what we believe about Jesus of Nazareth, whom we call "The Christ".

So we say that even though "Jesus - the human being" certainly did have a human origin in the womb of his mother Mary AND is human in every way we are (except sin),

it was God's Word (whom we call "The Son") who joined himself to this human being, and so, Jesus of Nazareth (human) was also "The Word" or "The Son" (divine).

This is called the doctrine of the "Incarnation".

Thus, in our Creed, we profess belief in

...Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
one in being with the Father...

But then, "The Son" enters human history, as we continue in the Creed:

...by the power of the Holy Spirit,
he was born of the Virgin Mary...
was crucified, died and was buried, etc...

Jesus Christ, then, is considered to be ONE person with TWO natures - a divine nature and a human nature - and this belief is crucial to the Catholic faith.

If Jesus Christ were not truly divine, he could not deliver on his promises to us about "eternal salvation"...and why would we pray to him.

And if he were not truly human, he would not have any credible relationship to us as human beings, and why would we find any comfort in him.

So we believe in a Redeemer who can deliver on his promises precisely because he is "God-human".

How these TWO natures of his interacted (for example, did his "divine" nature provide his "human" nature with any perks...like "knowing things before they happen"?) is the subject of another discussion.

But the fact remains: the Incarnation is the foundation of Catholic belief and has been the center of controversy and discussion in the Church for the last two thousand years.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

"Make progress, my brothers;
examine yourselves honestly again and again...
Do not be content with what you are...
Always add something more,
keep moving forward,
always make progress."

St. Augustine
Sermon 169

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

Best of luck to all of you as you begin academics.

And know that we pray for you all the time.

Let me know if I can be of assistance in any way.

Woodie